

It didn't take long for Lana Del Rey to release a follow-up to *Ultraviolence*, and less than a year later she announced that recording was already underway for a new project. On *Honeymoon*, Lana abandons the rock influences of her previous album, instead returning to the string-led chamber pop of *Born To Die*. Is this a retreat into safer territory, or a refinement of a sound that held untapped potential?

One of the issues plaguing *Born To Die* was its repetitive style, and *Honeymoon* does a much better job keeping things interesting. Take the lead single, "High By The Beach": Slotted between two slower cuts, its trap instrumentals and swaggy chorus work surprisingly well and sharpens the pacing of the album's first half. The trip-hop beats and bubbly synths on "Art Deco" are the track's secret sauce, spicing up Lana's slow, dreamy delivery. As the song progresses it gets jazzier; Trumpets and waves of strings fill out the chorus as Lana declares "You want more". A highlight at the album's centre. Even when Lana is playing with a familiar toolkit, the mix is punchier and more thoughtful. The opener is a standout example. Lana's vocals are mixed incredibly high, and you can even hear the fuzz of the vocal recording a little. It features some of the boldest strings on any Lana project. What could have easily sounded flat is instead hauntingly beautiful. There's a deep echo that draws out the vocals on one of the other big singles, "Music to Watch Boys To". Complimented by soft synths and a cavernous rumbling that lumbers throughout, it's an elegant tightrope balance between baroque and dream pop

*Honeymoon* doesn't feature Lana's best lyrics, but they do show promise and there's more variety in the subject matter. Jazz and blues music reminds Lana of a lost love on "Terrance Loves You". There's a passage where she fiddles with a radio, searching for memories of him: "Can you hear me all night long? / Ground control to Major Tom", a cute interpolation of David Bowie. "Salvatore" shows Lana flexing her skills at creating an immersive setting, but instead of the American heartland she takes us to a romantic Italian town. As she sings "Cacciatore / Limousines / Ciao, amore / Soft ice cream", you can feel her embodying the sorrow of a lonely Italian bar singer. "God Knows I Tried" isn't the deepest song, but it's a theme that Lana will return to on later albums. As she struggles with negative publicity, she finds support in her faith. This track is one of a handful that feel like they come from Lizzy Grant herself, and you can feel her slowly moving away from the character she's invented

The album has two problems. The first is that it's inconsistent. "Religion" and "The Blackest Day" are a bit tedious and even if "God Knows I Tried" has narrative significance, I wish it were more interesting to listen to. *Honeymoon* also ends with a Nina Simone cover but it lacks the personality that made the Nina cover on *Ultraviolence* so charming. The second issue is that nearly every song is 4 or 5 minutes long and they're all slow ballads. After an hour of drawn-out love songs, even the polished production can't stop it from getting monotonous

It's one of her better albums from this era and demonstrates a lot of growth for her songwriting. It's better than *Born To Die* but *Ultraviolence* is still the better record. If it were trimmed down a few tracks we could have had something spectacular, but as it stands it's still pretty decent